ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 30

WALL STREET JOURNAL
18 November 1983

'Zero' Option in Nicaragua

By Ronald Radosh

For years, U.S. presidents have bemoaned having to support corrupt and authoritarian regimes in the Western Hemisphere because the only acceptable alternatives were too weak and would be replaced by an extreme left and pro-Moscow regime. "Our only hope for Cuba," Dwight D. Eisenhower said after Fidel Castro's victory in 1959, "lay with some kind of non-dictatorial 'third force,' neither Castroite nor Batistiano." That search always seemed to prove elusive.

Now, as rumors abound of plans for a U.S.-supported invasion of Nicaragua by the renewed Condeca alliance, Nicaraguan revolutionary Eden Pastora is touring the U.S., bearing a message that is difficult for both Managua and Washington to accept.

Under his *nom de guerre* Commander Zero, Mr. Pastora led the assault on Anastasio Somoza's National Palace in 1979 that caused the dictator to free major political prisoners, including some of Nicaragua's current ruling directorate. But by early 1981, Mr. Pastora, opposed to the revolution's radical turn, had left the country.

Unlike the *contras* supported by the Reagan administration in Honduras—the so-called Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN)—Mr. Pastora affirms a commitment to the original Sandinista "project": social change based on pluralism, democracy and non-alignment. Indeed, he bristles when he is referred to as a contra and proclaims, "I am a Sandinista revolutionary." He reminds all who will listen, "There was and still is a revolution that took place in Nicaragua, and this revolution is irreversible." He argues that Managua's National Directorate falsely holds the mantle of this movement.

The Cuban Revolution

Yet, four years after the Sandinista victory, Nicaragua maintains a facade of pluralism. Opposition parties have no ability to contest for power, but they do exist. Trade unions effectively oppose the junta's attempts to dominate labor, and the Roman Catholic Church functions as a bulwark against total acceptance of a Cuban-Soviet model. Ironically, Nicaragua fits Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick's model of an authoritarian state—a country led by a reformist, modernizing military whose leaders promise elections in the future, and who permit the existence of institutions that they do not control, but that do not threaten their power. The difference—not a small one—is the totalitarian goals of some of Nicaragua's leaders.

Eden Pastora

The early years of the Cuban revolution provide a telling contrast to the Nicaraguan experience. A year and a half after Fidel Castro took power, he had curbed free unions, gained tight control over cultural and intellectual life, and—most important—had neutralized the man whose popularity as a military and political leader might have become an obstacle to Cuba's consolidation as a Marxist-Leninist state: When Mr. Castro put Maj. Huber Matos in prison in October 1960, all effective opposition to Mr. Castro's course was over.

The Sandinistas, in contrast, allowed their opponents to stay and dissent mildly or go into exile. It was in April 1981 that Mr. Pastora issued his statement from Costa Rica condemning the ruling Sandinistas for living in the mansions of the former rich and for driving their Mercedeses. Mr. Pastora's pressure for moderation was ignored, and he says he was "beginning to feel the political price of being inactive." That led him to want to show what he calls "military muscle" by trying to organize and arm a guerrilla force. This, he says, is meant to gain leverage for his preferred goal of a political solution.

That solution—which he sometimes refers to as a "historic compromise" (a term perhaps borrowed from the Italian Communists)—envisions a new government based on national reconciliation, on elections in which the entire coalition that overthrew Mr. Somoza, from Communists to conservatives, would take part.

Mr. Pastora is adamantly opposed to any foreign military intervention in Nicaragua, although he distinguishes that from help in the acquisition of weapons for his own troops. Should an invasion occur, however, he suggests that his forces would fight alongside the directorate's army he opposes.

Ironically, Mr. Pastora's challenge to Managua has been recognized in a way by Mr. Castro, whose government recently initiated talks in Havana with some of Mr. Pastora's top aides. Mr. Pastora is vague about what took place during these talks. He says only that Mr. Castro was seeking to cause a split in his own Democratic Revolutionary Alliance. But he adds that Mr. Castro's overture was of great benefit, a clear acknowledgment on the Cuban's part that "objectively [the alliance] is in the south of Nicaragua and that you cannot hide it." Moreover, the talks proved Mr. Pastora's independence, reaffirming what he calls his right to "talk to anyone we choose," including Washington and Moscow.

Mr. Pastora suggests that Mr. Castro wishes to play a mediating role and thus limit any potential Central American war that would end up engulfing Cuba and would threaten its revolution. But for the Cuban to do so, Mr. Pastora demands, "Castro has to get his own troops out of Nicaragua."

Yet Mr. Pastora's stand is hardly comforting to the U.S., since he expects it to keep its hands off as well. He sounds like any other Sandinista revolutionary when he states that "the problem with Washington is that it prefers puppets rather than allies."

He recalls that after the State Department's decision to block a scheduled shipment of $10 million of wheat to Nicaragua in January 1981, supposedly to force a cutoff of aid to El Salvador's guerrillas, the arms flow from Nicaragua slowed but economic assistance wasn't resumed. Bread lines formed in the cities, and the Marxist-Leninists in the leadership enjoyed new political leverage that allowed them to move the country further in the direction they probably always favored—a radicalization along Cuban lines. Moderates like Alfonso Robelo, a wealthy businessman within the Sandinista fold, and former Ambassador to the U.S. Arturo Cruz were led to exile along with Mr. Pastora. Mr. Robelo is now part of Mr. Pastora's alliance.

The solution to the crisis in Central America, Mr. Pastora says, must come from both the U.S. and the Sandinista directorate. Washington, he says, sees "all trouble in Central America coming from Moscow or Havana, and it ignores the internal origins of the crisis. Managua believes all of its troubles come from Washington and the CIA. Each is the mirror image of the other."

Apparently Naive

That dual message seems difficult for Washington to digest. Officials chose not to embrace Mr. Pastora during his swing through the capital this week. Some in the administration are known to think he is Pollyannaish about the prospects of holding quick elections should he dislodge the junta and to doubt his ability to run the country.

It seems naive of Mr. Pastora to think that an administration hardly friendly to revolution would ever consider providing his forces with military equipment. Mr. Pastora, after all, is firm in his refusal to merge with the FDN, whose military ranks are honeycombed with ex-members of Somoza's national guard.

CONTINUED